Kristin Herron

Re-discovering Lost Lives
Domestic Servants at Glenmont, Edison NHS

In July 1994, the tour at Thomas A. Edison's home, Glenmont, changed. For the first time, much of the first floor service area was opened to the public as part of the regular tour. Although these rooms—the service hall, servants' dining room, kitchen, refrigerator room, and butler's pantry—were not restored, staff at Edison National Historic Site recognized strong visitor interest in them. For many years, the servants' work area had only been shown during "An Edison Family Christmas" and for Women's History Month. Because of their popularity and their importance to Edison's story, it seemed appropriate to keep them open all of the time. Park rangers could now better answer the oft-asked question: "Where's the kitchen?"

When Glenmont is interpreted to the public, stories of Edison family life are vital to bring the now-static interiors alive. The same is true of the service areas. Glenmont's architect, Henry Hudson Holly, wrote that, "The comforts and accommodations for servants in the country are matters which should receive more consideration than is usually accorded them." Holly followed his own advice, designing a house with nearly one third of its space devoted to domestic servants. Aside from the butler and assistant butler, all of Glenmont's house staff—which grew as large as 10—were women.

Who were these women? To make Glenmont's story more compelling, we needed to know more about the women who were most intimate with behind-the-scenes work. But discovering information about actual domestic servants was a seemingly impossible challenge. Although the archives at Edison National Historic Site (NHS) include Mrs. Edison's payroll lists for her staff, only the names of male grounds workers appear. In an 1892 note, Mina Edison directed Mr. Randolph, Thomas Edison's financial secretary, to: ". . . simply state department of girls as there are often changes, thus constantly altering names. The amount will always be the same unless I tell you differently."

Her words seemed an enormous obstacle. How could we unearth information on unnamed women? Diligent research, collaboration between curatorial and interpretation staff, and a good dose of serendipity, have uncovered a much more substantial record of some of these women. As new information is found, a separate file on each person is created in Glenmont's research files. Initially, federal and state census records from 1895-1920 provided names and small details. Although Mina Edison indicated that names of the "girls" should be left off payroll lists, sometimes they found their way in. Private family letters—even one written to Thomas Edison from a dismissed Swedish maid—added depth to the files. Contemporary newspaper and magazine articles about the Edisons occasionally mentioned their servants. An oral history with Mrs. Edison's social secretary (who worked at Glenmont between 1931-1936) gave insight into the role of hired help and named additional staff members.

Curiously, some of the richest resources have come when least expected. For example, while on a public tour, June Mates mentioned that she had grown up on the Glenmont estate. Park ranger John Warren spoke with her and learned that her father was Sidney Scarth, the Edison's long-time chauffeur.

We quickly arranged for a meeting, where she recounted memories of growing up on the estate out of sight of the "big house." June Mates remembered women who worked at Glenmont—an "Irish woman with an accent," "Mrs. Tom" (the gardener's wife) who occasionally did the laundry, and Queenie Adams, the Edison's cook from 1926 until her death in 1937. She "could make the best ice cream you could ever want to taste" and always saved some for the chauffeur's children. June Mates and her mother used to walk with Queenie down Honeysuckle Lane, the road on the north side of the estate, with June holding on tightly to the cook's hand. As Queenie's obituary stated, she was a "favorite of the family" as well.

Such contacts have even led us to reevaluate the role of another woman who served the Edisons. Miss Lucy Bogue, the children's piano teacher and later Mrs. Edison's secretary/companion, was long believed to have been the children's governess as well. But a research query from her great-nephew led to regular, ongoing correspondence with him and a great-niece. Information from their private, family history shows that she could not have been a governess at Glenmont.

Instead, she owned her own business in New York City. Later, she became a virtual member of the Edison family, moving in permanently around 1930. Other sources, like the *New York Times*, introduce an actual governess, Canadian Ethel K. Pardoe, who appeared in the paper because of the unfortunate circumstance of her suicide "induced by worry over the safety of the children of Mrs. Thomas A. Edison." The stress she felt tending to the children of a world-famous man provides an unexpected and telling dimension to the daily roles of these seemingly silent women.

Personal recollections and details from contemporary written sources provide intimate glimpses that enrich the story of Glenmont's domestic servants. The lives of these real people are now shared with visitors to Edison NHS in a variety of ways. The Glenmont site brochure notes the important role of domestics and lists a few specific names. Regular displays for Women's History Month at the laboratory complex of Edison NHS introduce Miss Bogue and maid Lena McCarthy Doyle Philips. A new traveling trunk will also feature some of these women. With names, faces, and more details, the service areas are now more alive. While artifacts belonging to those women are rare, the display of a few such objects from the park's collections—Miss Pardoe's sheet music, Lucy Bogue's hand towel—make connections more tangible. As we continue forward with our research, always eager for more information, it is very exciting to see that discovering these lost lives is not nearly so impossible as we had thought.

Kristin Herron is the curator at Glenmont, Edison National Historical Site.

Kim Moon

"Raising Our Sites"
Integrating Women's History into Museums

In her 1989 essay, "Speaking of Women: Museums' Representation of Women's History," Barbara Melosh suggests that women's history doesn't ask "How do women fit into history?" but rather, "How can the discipline of history be re-imagined to take account of female experience?" This question gets to the heart of a challenge currently facing many of the country's historic sites and museums: how to move beyond token programming and predictable exhibits to make the story being conveyed to the public fully inclusionary of both men's and women's experiences.

A few years ago, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) began to develop statewide programs that reflected the growing public interest in women's studies. Historians and museum professionals acting as advisors to the Council on potential projects commented on the absence of women's history at the state's historic sites and museums. These Pennsylvania sites number over 500 and annually serve hundreds of thousands of Americans—schoolchildren, families, adults—who come to learn about our collective national history. These advisors reasoned that improvements in the presentation of women's history were essential if the state's historic facilities were to truly represent the full range of American life.

In response, the Council developed "Raising Our Sites: Women's History in Pennsylvania," a three-year project to incorporate women's history into the interpretation of 14 historic sites throughout the state of Pennsylvania. Funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the project served to foster collaboration between academic scholars and museum staff.

The sites selected to participate in "Raising Our Sites" were chosen mainly on the basis of interest—they had already begun some work in women's history or expressed a strong interest and capacity for doing so. Comprising a diverse sample of Pennsylvania historic sites in terms of geographic locations, subject matter, and facility structure, they included one National Park Service site, five sites of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, six private historical societies and museums, one research library, and one college.

In preparation for participation in "Raising Our Sites," staff from each of the sites worked with a project advisor to devise a workplan that detailed specific objectives in the integration of women's history into their existing and/or planned